

Persecution Defeats Itself.

323

crime worthy of death. They had not systematically haled to dungeon and stake all who disagreed with them ; they had not burned dissidents like Gardiner and Bonner.. Some, like the doctor in the third dialogue of the "Discourse of the Common Weal," were even advocates of freedom of discussion in religious controversy. They had, happily, refrained from damning their cause with wholesale atrocities, which made the Romanist creed seem the creed of savages, and they were ere long to reap the fruit of their forbearance and their heroic suffering in the recoil from this savage cult. The brutal persecution of the Protestants defeated itself. It made the queen and her bloody creed widely unpopular; it intensified the hatred of the pope; it gave rise to abortive conspiracies in favour of Elizabeth, such as the Dudley conspiracy, which was checked before it could develop ; and it paved the way for the irrevocable triumph of the reformers under that queen whose life the bigots would fain have taken.

It is hardly possible to palliate these enormities by the plea of the spirit of the age. Persecution for religious opinions was the accepted dogma of the day. But it may be taken as certain that such inhuman persecution of Catholics by Protestants would have been impossible, and it may be assumed that Catholics in general would have been equally incapable of such enormities. In these matters it is usually the few fanatics in authority that give the lead.

The attempt to exonerate the Church of blame by plausibly holding the civil authority responsible for the penalties inflicted is a very feeble one. A recent historian of the English Church during this period, Mr Gairdner for instance—and he apparently a Protestant—lays great stress on this fact. He forgets that the spirit of persecution which dictated these atrocities was the spirit of the men who conducted these trials. If they did not carry out the sentence, it was not because they were in favour of clemency, but because it was not their business to do so. They certainly were not the men to wash their hands, on this flimsy pretext, of the blood so cruelly shed under their bigoted *regime*. Such judgments are lacking in the courage to face the facts, and I am glad to be able to quote at least one Catholic writer, Mr Tierney, who, in his notes to Dodd's "Church

History/' does not hesitate to use